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# Mayor's Lesbian/Gay Task Force

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November 21, 1988

Mr. John Lippman  
News Director  
KIRO - TV  
2801 Third Avenue  
Seattle, WA 98121

Dear Mr. Lippman:

We are writing to express our grave concern regarding KIRO-TV's "Top Story" segment (November 20) addressing lesbian/gay adoptive parenting.

Our concerns arise from the following sources:

- Biased terminology.

Four times in the story -- once in the report, once by the male anchor, and twice by John Carlson -- the term "sexual preference" was used. John Carlson, in his role as commentator, may use what terminology he chooses. The report itself should have used more neutral terminology, "sexual orientation" being first choice.

It is common for critics of lesbian/gay people to claim that same-sex orientation is a willful choice or preference, and therefore the individual is subject to blame for having made it. However most experts on sexuality and human development agree that a person's sexuality (whether homosexual or heterosexual) is determined at a very young age and, as a rule, can be hidden but not changed in later life.

Unfortunately, this segment may have significantly added to that. The preferred "sexual orientation," therefore, is both accurate and neutral, even by the standards of critics.

- Confusion of the issue.

If, as the female anchor averred, it is important to note that molestations occur in heterosexual families as well as gay/lesbian families, what possible point did the interview with Forrest Messenger serve?

By holding Forrest Messenger up as an example of "what can happen," you, as a news organization, utterly failed in your responsibility to be balanced and factual. You could have checked with Pepper Schartz or other sociologists to discover that the vast majority of molestations occur by heterosexual men; gay men, who comprise roughly 10% of the overall population, commit less than 10% of molestations; and molestations by lesbians are rare.



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The visual and aural message of that portion of the segment served only to strengthen the stereotype of gay men and lesbians as child molesters. Regardless of the cautions given by the anchors, the lingering message to viewers will be "Gay men and lesbians are child molesters."

Such being the case, the inclusion of the interview with Mr. Messenger was outrageously inflammatory and irresponsible.

● Creation of controversy.

You emphasized the controversial nature of this story in the teasers, the body of the report, and the trailer. Yet the sole evidence of such controversy lay in the opinions of Glenn Dobbs and your own John Carlson, both members of the Washington Policy Council. Does the opinion of the Washington Policy Council constitute controversy sufficient to repeatedly label an issue as "controversial?"

A lingering doubt remains -- and we are willing to be informed on this subject -- as to whether this was a controversy created by the producer of this story for the purpose of the story itself.

Especially given the stigma to which gay and lesbian people are often subject, it is essential that you be aware of the consequences of that stigma, and most importantly, the part which the media can play in the level to which such stigma burdens the daily lives of lesbians, gay men, and their children.

Unfortunately, this segment may have significantly added to that burden.

Because of the serious nature of our concerns about the adoption story, we request a meeting with you at your earliest convenience to further discuss these concerns with you and with Dave Thompson.

I will call this week to arrange such a meeting.

Sincerely,

*John G. Wilkinson*

John G. Wilkinson  
Chair, Media Relations Committee

cc: Dave Thompson, Producer

JGW:dp